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The New Left's
latest crime
against education.

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THE USES OF A "CRITICAL UNIVERSITY"

BY Cheri Kent Litzenberger

If we have not been convinced of "New Left" anti-intellectualism yet, their one "contribution" to proposals for the improvement of education--the "critical university"--should convince us.

Just as "progressive" politics has almost progressed us back to the era of mob rule by brute force in which no science of politics was necessary or possible, so "progressive" education has rapidly progressed us toward the destruction of knowledge. Those implementing the completion of both feats are today's "activists." Just as the young savages of the New Left have taken their professors' lessons in the impotence of reason literally, and resorted to gut reactions and hysterical violence in practical ethics and politics, so have they carried professional skepticism to its logical results in the more esoteric realms of academia. Contrary to popular opinion, the contemporary products of modern philosophy are doing more than simply seizing and destroying the physical university: they are intent upon seizing and destroying its intellectual substance as well. And those who naively assume that their attacks on educational institutions as "tools of the military-industrial complex" are purely politically motivated ought to look more closely at what they are offering as an alternative.

The idea of a "critical university" derives its name from its function: to criticize existing institutions and their theoretical justifications. The role of the intellectual in society, and hence of the university, according to this view, is not to be the transmitter and advancer of knowledge, but to be the instrument

edge one acquires which will be of practical use to him in later life is by definition not "intellectual" enough. Students should seek "pure" knowledge--because only if knowledge is sought as an end in itself can intellectuals provide their function of producing ideas in opposition to the existing social reality.

By this curious process of dialectical logic and inversion, "knowledge" and "ideas" become the modern equivalent of Platonic forms to be contemplated; liberal arts and sciences, in particular, should not be studied for what they can contribute to an individual's chosen career or practical enjoyments. One student criticizes the university specifically for its success in catering to the worldly desires of some of its students while neglecting "true" intellectualism:

> "There is no question that many of the professionals who manage our highly complex technological society require, as background to their training in these occupations, an introduction to the liberal arts and sciences. And there is no question, either, that the university must offer courses in the liberal arts and sciences which are prerequisites to training in these various vocations. What is happening, however, is that these courses are being taught and are being learned not in the spirit of seeking out truths or understanding environments--but with the view of giving and getting the necessary information and grades to enter schools of law, medicine, engineering, agriculture, architecture, education and the like. And, increasingly, the university itself is being used to train doctors, lawyers, engineers, agronomists, teachers. In this way, the teaching and learning of subjects...is being distorted by being treated not as ends in and of themselves, not as having intrinsic value." (C.W. Gonick, "Self-Government in the Multiversity," in The University Game, ed. Adelman & Lee (Toronto, 1968), p. 40.)

The distinction here suggested between "education" and "training" is familiar in New Left criticism. True education, apparently, should have nothing whatever to do with practical reality--at least not for professional intellectuals:

> "One would like to see some attempt to establish, within the multiversities, true centres of learning, creativity and scholarship, with no obligation to train useful citizens. Because they will have no connection with the labour market, there will be no need to issue licenses, certificates or degrees, and what necessarily goes with them, exams and grades." (Ibid., p. 45)

The way the alternatives are posed here is typical: either one goes to school to become a "useful citizen," or one goes to school to become a member of a "useful class" which no one will recognize as useful--the class of true intellectuals. Since a true center of learning like that described above would be the true servant of society, society should make it possible. But since non-intellectuals cannot grasp the value of supporting

Taking them at their word, the New Left has come up with a replacement: the critical university, in which such old-fashioned notions as "knowledge" are dispensed with entirely. Having swallowed the conclusions of modern philosophy wholesale, these "progressive" educational theorists propose to educate people according to principles consistent with them. There is no such thing as "knowledge of reality": hence, students are not to be taught facts. In fact, there are no such things as "facts": hence, students are not to be taught. Students are to be "exposed" to "ideas." Ideas about what? About what men presently do and believe. As a San Diego State College professor recently put it: the purpose of education is to teach "life-styles"--not to teach "content" (there is no content, or at least no single correct content), but to teach "form." Granting that man is ignorant, the only thing left to concern ourselves with is the manner in which he displays his ignorance.

Lest you think that I am exaggerating, or that such an approach is applicable only to courses in psychology, sociology and political science, let me remind you that modern "philosophers" spend their time analyzing what people mean by the language they use, which, it is claimed, has no reference to reality. And let me give you an example of what happens to a subject like literature.

The purpose of the formal study of literature is to learn to understand and evaluate literary works of art. A "critical university" seminar now being given (for credit) in the Department of Literature at the University of California, San Diego, however, is described as follows:

> "Our leading question has been posed as the justification of literary studies. But we cannot pretend to confront this final problem immediately and directly. We propose rather to begin moving toward it by mediating analysis of "literature," as an idea and as an institution. Doe it, in the first place, as a concept, have an internal sense? As a discipline, does it have a real or a merely presumptive object? Is its existence as a cirriculum of studies justified 'in right' or merely <u>de facto</u>?"

In other words, this course is to consider such questions as: Is there any such thing as literature? Does the study of literature have a purpose? Is a cirriculum of studies in literature justified?

I should point out that this course was instituted by a number of graduate students and faculty members in the department. In response to the bulletin they sent out, I wrote to the head of the Department to explain why such a course should not be given Department sanction:

> "It is perfectly proper to ask: what is the meaning of 'literature'? (Though if one does not know, he should not be a professor of it or an advanced student in it.) It is not legitimate to ask: is there any such thing as literature? A department of nothing does not and should not exist.
>
> It is perfectly proper to ask: what is the object

explicitly state their premises and goals. They are not concerned with the study of literature; their "final question," as they put it, is "what service do we in fact have to offer our communities?" Which, translated, means, "how can we use the profession of literary scholarship as a weapon for social change?" (The alternative translation would be: how can we increase men's understanding and appreciation of literature?--but since they aren't sure it exists, I do not think this is what they had in mind.) Professor O.B. hardison recently pointed out that this brand new alternative to contemporary mis-education has in fact been prevalent since the beginning of the century. And Professor Hardison's answer to the so-called progressive scholars is one which students should seriously consider. The scholar's responsibility, he says, is to his subject. "He has the responsibility to give his best to it, to defend it when it is attacked, to explain it when it is misunderstood, to illuminate it as far as he can, and to pass it on--at best enriched, but at least undiminished--to later generations. Above all, he has the responsibility not to sell out--not to surrender it to those who would use it for ulterior ends, no matter how laudable." The extent to which his concept of the role of the intellectual in society differs from that of the New Left is admirably clear in his remarks on his own profession: "We must explain the end of humanistic study--that is, the value of the humanities...We need to assert...that the experience of great literature has been, is, and will be centrally valuable for educated men...that as scholars we are not responsible for saving society but for preserving and enriching the civilization that results from social organization...A second task...is to explain the means of humanist study...We need to make it clear that we know what we are doing and that, by and large, what we are doing is right." (Professor Hardison's article is "The MLA and Social Activism," PMLA, 83 (Sept., 1968), 985-987.)

The obvious difference between an intellectual like Dr. Hardison and the New Leftists is that he knows what values the intellectual does have to offer--he does not consider the intellectual "useless"--and that he knows what he is doing.

The concept of "critical university" courses was originally a product of the New Left strategy of creating "parallel institutions" which would compete with existing ones (a peculiarly capitalistic notion). And if students and "teachers" want to institute courses like that described above for no credit, or in appropriate departments (though I cannot think of any), we should have no objection. But the New Left and their professorial mentors, who view people as too stupid to know what's good for them, do not like to compete. Just as they prefer to take over existing universities instead of building their own, so do they prefer to use the status of existing intellectual standards (or what few are left) to give credence to their admittedly anti-academic courses. There is only one reason for using the sanction of a literature department for such a course as that described: to undermine the discipline as a field of study. If these people question the existence of literature, they are welcome to leave the field; they are not welcome to claim to be experts in it (and to be granted degrees) on the basis of their professed ignorance. If a surgeon began to question the existence of the human body we should hope that he would keep him-

[reported G.A.O. to a Senate committee], we had completed interviews with 80 enrollees, or in a few instances their parents, of whom 70, or 87.5% made one or more allegations of irregularities in activities carried out by PRIDE." These irregularities included payroll padding, kickbacks of wages, and fraudulent check endorsements. Life reporters, however, managed to overlook any evidence of such practices, or perhaps, having swallowed the dogma of Marx and Marcuse whole, thought that fraud is a natural appendix to capitalism and thus not worthy of mention in their glowing article on PRIDE.

But whatever Life's motives, its most dramatic oversight was not PRIDE's fraud. Addressing the House, Representative Joel P. Broyhill (R. Va.) alleged: "When the Washington riots occured in April, as many as 52 PRIDE employees were involved, with Winston Station, the new chairman of the board, standing in one police precinct posting bond for them as they were brought in. When the riots ended, the harrassment of merchants began..."PRIDE's aspiring little "capitalists" went right to work -- peddling picture posters of Dr. Martin Luther King. "The fee for purchasing the posters ranged from $1 up to $25 or more, but the penalty for not buying them was made quite clear -- buy or you are next." "In early May, a PRIDE supervisor took his crew along to the liquor store of Ben Brown and shot Mr. Brown fatally when he protested...."

Many may wonder at the sudden loving acceptance of "black capitalism" by the "liberal" press in general, after its years of deprecations against capitalism. There is no enigma here, really. The press has merely selected a new word (however ill-fitting) to cloak continuing support of the welfare state.

In ascribing to "black capitalism," ills and evils of the mixed economy, LIFE and similar magazines have unwittingly perpetrated a new smear against the free economy.

This new smear differs from its predecessors in several ways. First it was never consciously meant as a smear. Second, the perpetrators seem quite enamoured with the new variety of "capitalism."

And no wonder: their new version of "capitalism" is so opposite in nature from the real thing as to rest happily with many staunch anti-capitalists (which is what it was designed for). Gone are old (very old) notions of the equivalency of freedom and capitalism; government subsidy and intervention are proffered instead. Gone are notions of profit as the motive power of capitalism and of the enteprenner as a "cold, cunning, greedy robber baron"; the new "capitalist" is pictured as either a altruistic squandrel or an impotent bumbler--the first, unwilling to earn a profit, the second, unable.

But crime, corruption, coercion, and charity are not a part of capitalism. The fourth estate's insistence otherwise reveals its knowledge as being shallow.

Reader's Digest, for example, graphically demonstrated hazy understanding in its February "Black Capitalism on the Move." Among its illustrations were the Black Economic Union of Cleveland, the

worse. The incredible quantity and variety of taxes, extra bookkeeping, regulations, restrictions, permits, codes, licences, inspections, laws, and programs that officials demand adherence to/or compliance with, insure new entorprenuers an almost impossible task. Also, politically sanctioned racism -- in unions, in publicly assisted organizations, in the South -- will continue to plague black businessmen.

Advocates of "black capitalism" who evade this are headed for disaster. Dr. Israel Unterman, an expert in Negro business, believes that "every business failure by a black will create frustration and anger not only against 'whitey' but also against the black leader who preached black capitalism as the only answer to the black economic problem." (Newsday, Jan. 25, 1969) It is imperative, then, that this latest attack on capitalism -- "black capitalism" -- be properly identified as the doomed half-measure that it is.

So-called black capitalists have ignored the chains that government is increasingly burdening the citizenry with, insisting instead that blacks earn a living even while half-enslaved, insisting that they continue to produce even while being systematically robbed. Such encouragement will not be enough to sweep away poverty and misery.

True capitalists must reveal the token nature of "black capitalism". They must point out that politician, press, and public alike, embrace capitalism only in word, not in deed.

True capitalists must do no less than cast off the chains. Less will never solve the problems. And less could never be capitalism.

EDITOR'S NOTES:

We are presently considering the feasibility of expanding REASON into a general format high-quality magazine with a printed interior and perhaps twice as many pages. Readers interested in aiding such a venture should contact us immediately. Some helpful skills and services would include writing, editing, research, finance, law, promotion, advertising, art, photography, and printing. In addition to the organization of the required skills, a prerequisite to such expansion would be enough subscription revenue to cover the added production costs. Readers could help here by sending in the names and addresses of several friends likely to subscribe if sent a complimentary copy.

- Clipping service: Beginning with next issue, the editor will pay up to four dollars for clippings used here. Readers are invited to send in clippings on any subject they believe of value.
- Complimentary copies: Should you wish us to send complimentary copies of this issue to friends, simply send us their names and addresses.
- Back issues of REASON are available from Oct. 68 (NO. 4 on for 25¢ each. A set of all five (4-8) is priced at only $1.